

319 ~~CLAIMS:~~

SUB B20

1. A method of selecting information stored in a data storage system, said
 5 method comprising the steps of:-
 defining at least one sort statement;
 determining the value of a relevance parameter for each data file in the
 stored information in respect of the or each sort statement;
 defining at least one sort statement site on a display means, wherein a sort
 10 statement site represents a respective sort statement;
 representing the data files as elements on the display means;
 effecting movement of at least one element from an initial position on the
 display means towards one or more sort statement sites, the movement of respective
 elements being determined in accordance with the relevance parameter for their
 15 associated data files in respect of each statement so that differences in the data files
 cause the elements to move relative to one another, thereby to provide a visual
 indication of the data files being sorted; and
 selecting at least one data file according to the position on the display means
 of its respective element.
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2. A method according to claim 1 further comprising the step of accessing data
 in the selected data file.

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3. A method according to claim 1 or claim 2 wherein the step of determining
 25 the value of the relevance parameter for each data file, for each sort statement,
 comprises the step of identifying the most relevant data file for each sort statement,
 assigning it a maximum relevance parameter value and determining respective
 normalised values for the rest of the data files based on said maximum relevance
 parameter value.
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4. A method according to claim 3 wherein the step of moving the elements
 comprises the step of determining a movement vector for each element based on the

magnitude of the normalised values of the respective data file and the direction of relevant sort statement sites relative to the element.

5. A method according to claim 4 wherein the step of determining a movement vector for each element comprises the step of determining a component movement vector for the element in respect of each sort statement based on the magnitude of the respective normalised value of the respective data file for the sort statement and the direction of the respective sort statement site to that element, and summing the component movement vectors.

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6. A method according to claim 4 or claim 5 wherein the elements move in steps and a movement vector is determined for each step.

7. A method according to claim 6 wherein the display means comprises an array of pixels and the movement vectors determine which pixels respective elements are moved to in each step.

8. A method according to any one of claims 4 to 7 further comprising the step of applying scaling factors to the respective movement vectors according to the respective positions of the elements on the display means.

9. A method according to claim 8 wherein the step of applying scaling factors comprises the step of selecting a scaling factor area distribution.

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10. A method according to any preceding claim wherein the step of defining the or each sort statement comprises the step of displaying a list of available sort parameters on the display means and selecting a set of sort parameters from the list.

11. A method according to claim wherein the step of defining the or each sort statement site comprises the step of selecting a respective position on the display means which correspond to a point on the circumference of a circle.

12. A method according to claim 11 wherein the initial position of the elements is defined at the centre of the circle.

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13. A method according to any preceding claim wherein each element moves from its initial position towards a site which represents the most relevant sort statement for the respective data file.

14. A method according to any preceding claim further comprising the step of storing the selected data files.

15. A method according to any preceding claim further comprising the step of pre-selecting at least one sub-class of data files to be sorted.

16. A method according to any preceding claim further comprising the step of pre-formatting the data files to be sorted.

17. A system for selecting information stored in a data storage system, said system comprising:-

a display means;

a sort statement generator for generating at least one sort statement;

a position generator for positioning respective sort statement sites on the display means;

a data processor for determining the value of a relevance parameter for each data file in the stored information in respect of the or each sort statement;

a visual signal processor for representing the data files as elements on the display means and for simulating movement of at least one element from an initial position on the display means towards one or more sort statement in accordance with the relevance parameter for the associated data file in respect of each statement so that differences in the data files cause the elements to move relative to one another and provide a visual indication of the data files being sorted; and

a data selector for selecting at least one data file according to the position on the display means of its respective element.

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